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ABSTRACT

The rationale for a reading program for the Afro-American is discussed. The school-age child is identified as the individual most affected by the problems of a dual culture. The following points are emphasized. (1) While the school is severely limited in any attempt to directly influence factors causing the disadvantaged environment, learning can be adjusted to take background and environment into account. (2) Nothing in the child's background automatically precludes his learning to read. (3) Practical solutions include the use of a variety of materials, instruction by a well-informed teacher with a knowledge of the developmental and sequential nature of the reading process, and provisions for adequate practice. (4) To be successful, the teacher must be aware of how ethnic group membership shapes the child's world. (5) Two key concepts of language to be developed in the child are an acceptance of the facts that there are a variety of language systems in our society and that standard English is the universal dialect in the child. (6) The successful reading program is dependent upon the interaction between the teacher, student, and materials. References are included. (WB)

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READING PROGRAMS FOR VARIOUS CULTURAL GROUPS

"THE READING PROGRAM FOR THE AFRO-AMERICAN"

In every ethnic group there is some major unifying of culture because the individual is labeled as an Afro-American, a Mexican-American, an Italian-American, a French-American or a French-Canadian. This label, having two parts, states that the person is a combination of both heritages or cultrues. The prefix explains his original heritage and background and the final term explains his presently acquired heritage and social environment.

Culture is defined according to Sociology as the sum of ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is

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transmitted from one generation to another. But at the present time ethnic groups composed of "dual-cultures" are experiencing cultural change - defined as the process by which a culture is significantly modified for one or more various reasons, such as contact with another culture.

However, the process of culture change that takes place when people live in long, continuing contact with one another is more complex than the simple diffusion of traits. Acculturation, the name given to the process, is not a one-sided phenomenon. When two societies are in contact with one another, one does not completely abandon its former culture and completely accept the other. An interchange of ideas and culture elements takes place. This is not an even process, and the rate and direction of change are dependent upon many factors. (5)

It appears that the individual most affected by this "duel-culture" is the school age child. He is actually living in both cultures. In his home environment he experiences the customs and values of his parents and their heritage. In his school environment he experiences the customs and values of the dominant influence in the society in which he is presently living. Difficulty arises for the child when the values and expectancies of both cultures are so

divergent that he cannot successfully operate in both the home and school environment. (7)

When the "dual-culture" child come to school, he does not come with nothing. He comes with something most important. He comes with a self and with a sense of belonging to whatever group is his. (2)

But how is "his group" determined? The subcultures in America today each have unique characteristics. They also have similarities which are more the result of economics than heritage.

Ausubel states this position:

> Many of the ecological features of the segregated Negro subculture that impinge on personality development in early childhood are not specific to Negroes as such, but are characteristic of most lower-class populations. This fact is not widely appreciated by white Americans and hence contributes to much anti-Negro sentiment: many characteristic facets of the Negro's value system and behavior pattern are falsely attributed to his racial membership, whereas they really reflect his predominant membership in the lower social class. (1)

Ever since Francis Galton in 1869 published his studies of hereditary genius, and perhaps long before, the existence of a substantial positive correlation between socioeconomic status and competence has been abundantly clear. Evidence continuing to affirm this association has continued to accululate. (6)

Social conditions cannot be ignored in education.

But according to Cohen:

> It appears that the school has served the useful purpose of relieving other social institutions of responsibility. If highway accidents increase, the school's driver education program is critized. A Russian spacehip is launched, and the school science program is attacked. Venereal disease rates increase and the school must assume responsibility for sex education. Social immorality breeds segregated societies and the schools are again the scapegoat.
>
> The Tragedy of the situation is that, while the school continues to accept the responsibilities of other social institution, many educators are no longer clear about the nature of the function of their own institution. For example, when the black community cries out about the low reading achievement of its children, the school refuses to accept the responsibility. Instead, educators respond with long dissertations on the psychosocial factors of home, community, family structure, and so on, as determinants of low reading achievement. How ironic, indeed; for finally taken a stand, they stand the wrong way on the most crucial school issue - literacy. (3)

Cohen's statement has many implications for educators. In some ways he is right. The school has assumed many of society's burdens. But in some ways he is wrong. The school cannot negate the psychosocial aspects of the child's home, community and family structure. But the school, now realizing the background and environment of its students, can adjust to meet their needs.

According to Cohen the breakthrough in the teaching of reading to disadvantaged children will come if we concentrate on the methodology of teaching, rather than on the causes of the disadvantaged position. His reasoning is that

the school is severly limited in any attempt to directly influence these factors. Nothing in the child's background automatically precludes his learning to read. The best method of promoting such achievement may derive from general laws of learning, not from the knowledge of his environment. (3)

Again Cohen has a good point. General laws of learning should be applied, but they can better be applied with a knowledge of the child's environment. In the combination of these, not the exclusion of either, lies the answer to the teaching of reading to the disadvantaged.

During the first years of Operation Headstart differences in learned factors of readiness were observed among disadvantaged children. These were due to a lack of opportunity to learn as determined by the knowledge of the home conditions. From this knowledge, the school should realize that for children from homes where reading readiness is not taught incidentally, then the school must teach it purposefully. (3)

"Intensive, through instruction that meets individual needs teaches disadvantaged children to read adequately. Such instruction appears to counterbalance the effects of environmental deprivation when we use reading achievement scores as criterion for growth." (3)

The tradition of purchasing one class set of a program with its teacher's manual and a few supplementary

storybooks is no longer valid. It does not provide an adequate reading program. Instead, teachers, teachers actually working with the children, should select varieties of materials, programs and pieces of programs to teach the developmental reading skills. The teacher will then integrate these into skill sequences and then dispense them according to individually diagnosed needs.

This implies that the teacher would have the necessary knowledge of the order and difficulty levels of the developmental reading skills. The teacher should also understand that reading is a process and not a subject and should be taught accordingly. This process is developmental and sequential and should be taught in this way. Each part or skill should be mastered before proceeding to the next skill.

It cannot be assumed that a skill is learned in the first presentation. It should be taught, practiced, evaluated, retaught and repracticed.

The most important area of practice is the area in which the need for a variety of materials is evident. No one program gives enough reenforcement for every skill. But if programs are used to complement and supplement each other, enough material for each skill can be readily available. Instead of thirty-two workbooks from one company, four from

eight different companies can be much more effective. Especially if these are cut up and categorized according to specific skills. These can be made into individualized learning kits by clearly writing the directions, pasting the pages to cards, typing the answers on the back and assigning the children the skill area in which they need practice. In this manner the activity becomes self-directing, self-correcting, and meets the needs of the children much more effectively than everyone's using the same book. (3)

There are also many commercially prepared skills kits that can be adapted to meet the needs of a particular classroom.

There are "Basal Readers, Linquistic Readers, Language Programs, Dialect Readers, Programmed Reading, Skill Starters, Structural Readers, Basic Phonics Programs, Games for Word Analysis, Reading Spectrums, Phonics Programs, Word Wheels, Workbooks, Reading Drills, Spelling and Writing Patterns, Better Reading Books, Curriculum Enrichment Series, Literature Samplers, Learning Units, Pacemakers and Skilpacers, Pilot Libraries", and the list could go on and on.

Which one is the most effective in the classroom? Not any one -- each has its strengths and weaknesses. Each has its place in the classroom, but not alone. The variety is most effective when it is used in the classroom by a know-

ledgable teacher who uses the strengths of the materials in an intensive instructional program that meets the individual needs of the students.

In every classroom there is a reading triangle. The Teacher, the children, and the materials or the tasks to be learned are the components of the triangle.

No matter how much we theorize and talk about methods and pedagogies and family structure and all the other factors related to reading, we must return to the classroom triangle.

It is the interaction and relationship between teacher, children and materials that makes a reading program.

A serious deficiency in any of these three components can be the cause of reading failure, or a lesser deficiency in two components, or a mediocre deficiency in all three components.

According to Goldberg, (4) it has become a cliche to state that the major effect on a child's learning results from what goes on in the classroom. We recognize that what the teacher and the children do during that time they are in direct contact with each other is the "compass of learning." And yet, until recently, little research has been aimed at the teaching process. We still cannot describe with accuracy what teaching is about, what the teacher actually says and does in the process of teaching, and what effect this has on the child-learning.

We also don't know why some teachers can be successful

with certain materials and methods, and other teachers need different materials and methods to be successful.

Goldberg (4) has set up a hypothetical model of the successful teacher of the disadvantaged. The successful teacher respects his pupils, views the culture of his pupils as a student, understands the backgrounds from which the children come, recognizes and understands their unwillingness to strive for future goals where such efforts provide little reward in the present.

The successful teacher is aware of the ethnic group membership of his pupils and how this shapes the child's image of himself and his world. He knows that the language of his pupils is closely tied to the lives they lead. Even though it may not be standard English, he recognized its functional qualities for the child.

The Teacher develops in his pupils certain key concepts of language. (9) One important concept is the variety of language systems in our society. Each can be identified, and each is appropriate for the speaker who uses it. The language system that communicates ideas and feeling effectively and is comfortable for the speaker and listener is appropriate. A second key concept of language is that standard English is the variety of English understood by most people regardless of the particular varieties of English they themselves speak.

Standard English is a kind of universal dialect in our society. It is the variety of English used in many of the important affairs of society. Therefore, standard English must be learned as an alternate dialect. It must be mastered to the extent necessary to assure effective communication without embarrassment or discomfort. The pupil must understand in which situations standard English is appropriate. Further, students should understand the social, vocational, and academic benefits of learning and using standard English effectively.

The student can easily see the need for more than one language in the meaning of Langston Hughes poem,

Motto

I play it cool
and dig all jive,
That's the reason
I stay alive.
My motto
As I live and learn,
is:
Dig and be dug
in return

In addition to his knowledge about the child in his environment, the successful teacher has an understanding of how a child's abilities are assessed and a realistic perception of what these measurements describe and predict. He knows that in the area of reading he must correctly diagnose the child's strengths and weaknesses and proceed to teach accordingly.

The successful teacher meets the child on equal terms,

as person to person, individual to individual. But, while he accepts, he doesn't condone.

He realizes the danger of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" of expecting and consequently finding a low level of achievement. He therefore, lets each pupil know that he expects more than the pupil thinks he can produce- but his standards are not so high as to become too remote to strive toward. He regards and is alert to every opportunity for honest praise, and, as much as possible witholds harsh criticism. But above all, he is honest.

This is the reading program for the Afro-American - a composite of the strengths of various programs adjusted to meet the needs of the individual students by a knowledgable, caring teacher.

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